

Parental Absence Experience and Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being of Boarding Students in Catholic Secondary Schools in Osogbo Diocese

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the level of psycho-spiritual well-being among students staying in Catholic secondary school boarding within the Catholic Diocese of Osogbo. The study was firmly fastened on the Psycho-Spiritual Theory of Pius Joyzy Egunjobi and Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969), which underscore the importance of spiritual development and emotional bonding in well-being of human. Convergent parallel mixed-method research design was adopted in this study. Data were collected from 67 boarding students across four Catholic secondary schools using the Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being Scale (P-SWBS). Additionally, a purposive sample of five students participated in semi-structured interviews which provided deeper insights. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics with SPSS, while qualitative data were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. The findings of this study revealed that boarding students displayed a moderate level of psycho-spiritual well-being across key dimensions such as self-awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion, and self-transcendence. Findings from qualitative analysis showed that students experienced emotional challenges, such as loneliness, sadness, and difficulty adjusting to boarding life. In the face of these challenges, students adopted different coping strategies, with spiritual practices such as prayer, participation in Mass, and confession emerging as the most dominant. Social support from peers, teachers, and school chaplains also played important role in helping students manage emotional distress. The study concluded that psycho-spiritual well-being among boarding students is sustained by strong coping mechanisms and support systems. Based on these findings, the study recommended that school-based counselling services should be strengthened, spiritual and pastoral care programs enhanced, peer support systems promoted, and further longitudinal research conducted to better understand long-term effects.

Keywords: Parental absence experience and psycho-spiritual well-being of boarding students

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is an important stage of development marked by emotional, psychological, and spiritual growth, where identity, emotional regulation, and meaning in life are formed. On the other hand, separation from parents and decreased involvement of parents in boarding settings may lead to challenges such as loneliness, anxiety, and emotional instability. Catholic school environments often provide alternative support systems that promote holistic well-being (Blau & Blau, 2021).

Psycho-spiritual well-being is the combination of psychological health and spiritual meaning. This include self-awareness, connectedness, meaning in life, compassion, and self-transcendence (Egunjobi et al., 2023). Spiritual practices such as prayer, Holy Mass, and pastoral care support students' resilience and emotional stability are part of Catholic education (Manning, 2014).

Observational evidence indicates that spirituality and social support increases well-being of adolescents, improves resilience and life satisfaction (Fisher, 2011; Wannebo et al., 2018). Limited studies have therefore

examined psycho-spiritual well-being among students living in boarding in Catholic schools in Nigeria, particularly with attention to its spiritual dimension.

This study therefore evaluates the level of psycho-spiritual well-being among boarding students in Catholic secondary school within Diocese of Osogbo.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Descriptive statistics summarize the main features of a data set without drawing conclusions beyond the data (Hayes, 2026).

The quantitative component of the study concentrated on measuring the level of psycho-spiritual well-being among boarding students using a standardized questionnaire. This provided numerical data that described the general pattern of psycho-spiritual functioning of boarding students. On the other hand, the qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews. This allowed participants to express their lived experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies in their own words.

The convergent mixed-methods design used in this study is appropriate because it combines the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative method provides measurable data, while the qualitative method offers rich, and detailed understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This integration improves the validity of the findings by allowing for aim triangulation of data sources.

The convergent mixed-method design used in this study enabled the researcher to assess the level of psycho-spiritual well-being among students and also to understand the underlying factors that support or influence their well-being within the school boarding environment. Therefore, the convergent mixed-methods design was suitable for achieving a holistic and in-depth understanding of psycho-spiritual well-being of boarding students.

Population and Sample

A population is any group of individuals that has one or more characteristics in common and that is of interest to the researcher (Skubiejute, 2019). It serves as the foundation for sampling, data collection, and analysis. Clearly defining the target population is essential for ensuring the validity and reliability of research outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The target population for this study consisted of 90 selected Catholic secondary school students residing in boarding facilities within the Catholic Diocese of Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. Both junior and senior secondary school students were included in this study. The study focused on students living within the boarding environment.

From this population, a total of 67 students were selected for the quantitative aspect of the study. These students provided data used to assess the level of psycho-spiritual well-being. In addition, five (5) students were selected purposively for the qualitative aspect of the study. The purposive selection allowed the researcher to obtain detailed information from participants who could adequately express their experiences.

The researcher considered this population to be suitable because students at this stage of development require support in many areas such as emotional, moral, and social development. Their experiences within the school boarding environment make them relevant for understanding psycho-spiritual well-being.

Instrument

A quantitative approach was employed to collect relevant data on the psycho-spiritual well-being of students staying in the boarding in Osogbo Diocese. The use of the instruments was consistent with the quantitative research design, which enables the researcher to collect numerical data for analysis and understanding of the research problem.

Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being Scale (P-SWBS)

The Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being Scale (P-SWBS) developed by Egunjobi et al. (2023) was used to assess the psycho-spiritual functioning of the students. The instrument is a 25-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure an individual's level of psycho-spiritual well-being. The scale consists of five domains, with each domain containing five items: Self-awareness, Connectedness, Meaning in life, Compassion, Self-transcendence.

The P-SWBS is a Likert-type instrument that assess how individuals assimilate emotional stability with spiritual meaning in their daily lives. It was considered appropriate for this study because it captures both psychological and spiritual dimensions of well-being within an educational and religious context.

The instrument has proved to be reliable and valid. Egunjobi et al. (2023) reported a high internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of approximately 0.80 and above for the overall scale, indicating that the items consistently measure psycho-spiritual well-being. The scale also showed good construct validity through factor analysis, confirming its five-domain structure.

Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to the process of examining and summarizing data in order to identify patterns, trends, and meaningful insights (Kumar, 2020). In this study, quantitative data analysis methods were employed in line with the mixed-methods design.

The quantitative data, obtained through the Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being Scale (P-SWBS), were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation. These statistical tools were used to determine the level of psycho-spiritual well-being among the boarding students. The mean provided information on the average responses of participants, while the standard deviation indicated the degree of variation in their responses. This enabled the researcher to classify the level of psycho-spiritual well-being into categories such as low, moderate, or high across the five dimensions of the scale: self-awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion, and self-transcendence.

FINDINGS

Demographic Data of Participants

This section presents the demographic information of the respondents who took part in the study conducted in Catholic secondary schools within Osogbo Diocese. The main aim of this information is to provide a clear description of the sample used in the study.

Out of the 67 participants, 42 (62.7%) were female, while 25 (37.3%) were male, indicating a higher representation of female students in the study. In terms of age distribution, 21 participants (31.3%) were between 10–12 years, 31 participants (46.3%) were between 13–15 years, 14 participants (20.9%) were between 16–18 years, and 1 participant (1.5%) was between 19–21 years. This shows that the majority of the respondents were within the early to mid-adolescent stage, a period associated with important emotional, social, and spiritual development.

Analysis Based on Research Objective

Objective 2: To assess the level of psycho-spiritual well-being among students in Catholic secondary school boarding in Osogbo Diocese.

The findings revealed that students demonstrated a moderate level of psycho-spiritual well-being.

- Mean (M) = 3.53
- Standard Deviation (SD) = 0.72

This indicates that students generally maintain a reasonable level of emotional stability, inner peace, and sense of meaning in life despite the challenges associated with living in a boarding school environment. The general level is the Overall Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being score is 3.53. The main interpretation is moderate.

Table Level of Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being and Its Dimensions

Variables/Dimensions	M	Level
Overall Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being (PSWB)	3.53	Moderate
Self-awareness	3.57	Moderate
Connectedness	3.39	Moderate
Meaningfulness	3.56	Moderate
Compassion	3.51	Moderate
Self-transcendence	3.62	Moderate

Note. M = Mean.

The results indicate that all the dimensions of psycho-spiritual well-being fall within the moderate level. Among the components, self-transcendence recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.62$), indicating that students have a relatively strong sense of spiritual connection and the ability to relate beyond themselves.

In contrast, connectedness recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.39$). This indicates that students may experience some challenges in forming or maintaining close interpersonal relationships within the school boarding environment.

The findings generally indicate that students possess a balanced level of psycho-spiritual well-being, with strengths in spiritual awareness and meaning in life, alongside some limitations in relational connectedness.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section discusses the main findings of the study in relation to the research objective and existing literature. The section also explains the meaning and significance of the results, highlights the limitations of the study, and presents implications for future research.

The findings from this study revealed that students in Catholic secondary boarding schools within Osogbo Diocese demonstrate a moderate level of psycho-spiritual well-being. This indicates that while students are not experiencing severe difficulties, they are also not functioning at an optimal level of well-being. Components such as self-awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion, and self-transcendence were all rated at a moderate level. This suggests that students are making efforts to maintain a balance in their emotional and spiritual lives.

The moderate level of psycho-spiritual well-being is significant because it indicates that students are able to adjust within the school boarding environment. This finding is consistent with Fisher (2011), who emphasized that spirituality serves as a protective factor that improved the ability of adolescents to cope with life challenges and maintain emotional stability. In the same way, Okoye et al. (2002) disclosed that active participation in religious activities contributes positively to moral and emotional development of students within school settings.

Apart from spiritual coping, boarding students also employed another coping mechanism which is social support systems. This include friends, teachers, and house masters or mistresses. This finding agrees with existing literature that emphasizes the role of peer and institutional support in promoting adolescent adjustment and well-

being. Some students also reported the use of emotion-focused coping strategies, like crying and withdrawal. Though these strategies may provide temporary relief, they may not be effective in the long term. This stresses the need for well-organized psychological and counselling support within the school environment.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the psycho-spiritual well-being of Catholic secondary school boarding students in Osogbo Diocese using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, revealing a moderate level of psycho-spiritual well-being. Students maintain emotional and spiritual stability but are not functioning at the most favorable level, with strong outcomes in self-awareness, meaning in life, compassion, and self-transcendence, though variations indicate inconsistent stability among some students.

Qualitative findings showed that students adopt different coping strategies, with spiritual coping as the most dominant through prayer and religious activities. Peer relationships, teachers, and caregivers also support emotional balance and adjustment.

In spite all these positives, students still experience loneliness and adjustment difficulties, indicating that existing support systems may not be enough for all. There is a need for improved emotional counseling services and more structured support systems. Psycho-spiritual well-being therefore is supported by spiritual engagement, peer relationships, and institutional support, but strengthening pastoral care, counseling, and structured systems is necessary for more consistent well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to improve the psycho-spiritual well-being of Catholic secondary school boarding students in Osogbo Diocese. Firstly, Catholic secondary school authority should provide well organized counseling services to support the psycho-spiritual well-being of boarding students. This involves the establishment of functional counseling units with trained counselors, conducting regular emotional screening, and offering programme such as stress management and group counseling. Secondly, support in the area of spirituality and psychology should be incorporated for holistic development. Students should receive training in emotional regulation, resilience, and stress management alongside prayer and sacramental life. Collaboration between school chaplains and school counselors, as well as retreats and recollections, will further support this integration. Thirdly, peer support programme should be strengthened by introducing mentorship systems where senior students guide juniors. Peer groups that is well monitored can also provide safe spaces for sharing experiences, helping to reduce loneliness and improve adjustment. Finally, it is essential to improve boarding welfare. Catholic secondary schools should ensure good living conditions, balanced routines, and access to recreational activities. These will enhance emotional stability and overall well-being of students.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, the sample size of 67 respondents is relatively small. This may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalized to a wider population of boarding students beyond the selected schools. A larger sample would have provided more robust and representative results. Second, the study relied on self-report measures such as questionnaires and interview responses. Response bias may affect responses of this approach because participants might underreport or overreport their experiences due to misunderstanding of items or social desirability. Third, the study was limited to selected Catholic secondary schools within Osogbo Diocese. This geographical restriction reduces the generalizability of the findings to other dioceses, regions, or non-Catholic school settings where contextual factors may differ. Lastly, the study adopted a cross-sectional design, which captured data at a single point in time. As a result, it does not allow for assessment of changes in psycho-spiritual well-being of students over time or the long-term effects of parental absence.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study provides a basis for further scholarly inquiry into parental absence experiences and psycho-spiritual well-being among Catholic secondary school students staying in the boarding. Rooted on its scope and limitations, the following areas are suggested for future research:

Firstly, future studies should consider the use of larger and more diverse samples drawn from multiple dioceses, school types, and geographical locations. The present study was limited to selected Catholic secondary school boarding within Osogbo Diocese. This may restrict the generalizability of the findings. A more extensive or wider sample would provide stronger external validity and allow for more representative conclusions.

Secondly, longitudinal studies that follow students over an extended period should be conducted. A cross-sectional design was adopted in the current study which captured experiences at a single point in time. Longitudinal research would help to determine how psycho-spiritual well-being and coping strategies evolve as student progress through different stages of boarding life.

Thirdly, there should be contrast between the boarding and day students to determine whether the experience of parental absence has different effects depending on the school living arrangement. Comparative studies like this would also help to identify the specific influence of boarding environments and religious school settings on psycho-spiritual development of students.

Finally, other influencing factors like personality traits, attachment styles, socio-economic background, and family relationships should also be examined by future researchers. These variables were not deeply explored in the present study. They may play a significant role in shaping how students experience and respond to parental absence. Investigating these factors would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of psycho-spiritual well-being among adolescents.

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